

## Remarks by CE at media session in Kuwait City (with photo/video)

The Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, concluded the visit of the business delegation comprising representatives from Hong Kong and Mainland enterprises to Middle East together with the Chairman of the Hong Kong Trade Development Council, Dr Peter Lam; the Chairman of the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce, Ms Agnes Chan; and the Chairman of the Dongchao Information Technology (Shanghai) Company Limited, Mr Wang Chaoyou, in Kuwait City, Kuwait, today (May 14, Kuwait City time). Following are the remarks by Mr Lee:

Chief Executive: Today marks the final day of our visit to Kuwait. I would like to extend my gratitude to the Kuwaiti Government for its high-level hospitality and meticulous arrangements. I am particularly grateful to the Kuwaiti Government for arranging the government team to stay at Bayan Palace. We are particularly grateful to the Acting Prime Minister for hosting the whole delegation for lunch at the Palace, leaving an unforgettable memory amongst all members of the delegation.

Yesterday, I met with His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, followed by the meeting with His Highness the Crown Prince. And then I also met the Acting Prime Minister, who hosted a roundtable discussion attended by senior Kuwaiti officials. We share a common commitment to deepening bilateral co-operation in trade, investment and cultural exchanges.

During our visit to Kuwait, we signed and reached 24 Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) and co-operation agreements, spanning across trade, investment, financial services, technology, legal co-operation, customs facilitation, aviation, tertiary education, etc.

Today is the last day of our Middle East visit. I would like to do a sum-up of my four-day visit to Kuwait and Qatar. The delegation comprised Hong Kong and Mainland business leaders. We achieved three key objectives:

1. To strengthen government-to-government relations;
2. To find new areas of collaboration;
3. To make friends, and extend our network.

The visit is successful, particularly in six areas.

First, we strengthened relations between the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government and the governments of Qatar and Kuwait, establishing collaborative consensus.

Second, the visit resulted in a total of 59 MOUs and agreements, 35 in Qatar and 24 in Kuwait, spanning across diverse areas and laying a robust groundwork for multifaceted co-operation.

Third, we deepened mutual understanding and strengthened commercial and

trading networks. Delegation members have expanded their network and connections, promoting the strengths and opportunities of Hong Kong and the Mainland to partners in Qatar and Kuwait.

Fourth, we showcased Hong Kong's unique role under "one country, two systems" as a "super connector" and "super value-adder", bridging global opportunities. I invited, for the first time, over 20 Mainland enterprise representatives to join the delegation, reflecting the synergy between Hong Kong and the Mainland. We together aim to provide end-to-end supply chain solutions for the Middle East and beyond.

Fifth, we bolstered ties with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states. We created broader opportunities. Plus the two countries I have visited during my last Middle East visit, we have now visited four of the six GCC member states, representing two-thirds of the bloc and 90 per cent of its population. The HKSAR Government is now actively exploring a free trade agreement with the GCC to further access this vital market.

Sixth, we advanced people-to-people exchanges. Two days ago, I announced Qatar's new 30-day visa-free arrangement for HKSAR passport holders. I am pleased now to further announce that the UAE (United Arab Emirates) will grant Hong Kong 30-day visa-free access starting May 15, while Oman will on the same date extend its visa-free period from 10 days to 14 days.

In meetings with leaders and officials, I appreciated their forward-looking vision and understanding of Hong Kong's unparalleled advantages under "one country, two systems" as a bridge between the Mainland and the world. Middle East countries are seeking diversification of risks and looking for opportunities in China and the HKSAR in order to join the tide of the global economic shift towards the East. In this, Hong Kong has boundless opportunities.

Reporter: I just have a couple of questions for you, please. Can you talk to us about the relationship between Kuwait and Hong Kong in particular, and Kuwait and China in general? The second question is about the Memoranda of Understanding that you have signed yesterday and today. How can you describe them? And how do they benefit the relations between Kuwait and Hong Kong?

Chief Executive: We have a very strong foundation of understanding and co-operation with Kuwait. Kuwait is the first country to sign two agreements together with Hong Kong. One is the agreement on investment protection and promotion, and another agreement is about the avoidance of double taxation. That speaks for the strong link, which has been established long ago between Hong Kong and Kuwait. We have been inspired by the Kuwait Vision 2035, which covers many areas in full alignment with what Hong Kong is doing and focusing on. The Kuwait Vision 2035 covers areas to transform Kuwait into financial centre, trading centre, infrastructure-building, human capital development, healthcare, sustainability, and also building Kuwait into a country of influence in this region and globally.

Hong Kong has a vision very similar to Kuwait in this regard. Hong Kong is a financial centre, and is a shipping and trading centre, and we are

developing Hong Kong into an I&T (innovation and technology) hub. We are quite proud of our education, because despite Hong Kong being just a city of 1 100 square kilometres, we have five universities that are within the top 100 globally, and we are quite strong in R&D (research and development), particularly a lot of our universities' research has been graded outstanding. What we are working hard is raising Hong Kong's profile in all this regard. Sustainability is also one of our focuses, both in what we do environmentally and also financially. We are doing a lot of green finance, and we emphasise strongly (ESG) compliance. That is where we are going, and we think there are a lot of things, because our visions just align so much together – a lot to do – and that is between Hong Kong and Kuwait. I am very thankful and grateful to His Highness, Amir of Kuwait, to meet me, and I am grateful to the Prime Minister also, to host a lunch in the palace for the whole team. Throughout all the meetings and discussions, we have very common understanding that we should co-operate more in different areas.

Coming to the relation between China and Kuwait, China is Kuwait's, I think, largest trade partner, and the diplomatic relations between China and Kuwait started long, long time ago, and the partnership is close and ever-rising. When I honourably saw His Highness, Amir of Kuwait, I felt his friendship, genuineness, and sincerity of building good relations between Kuwait and China. I am honoured to be able to be part of that success story. My whole team feels proud to be in that part of success story.

Coming to the MOUs we have signed with Kuwait, both the governments and different parties, 24 agreements and MOUs, they cover a wide range of areas. Despite the very good foundation we already have, we are now formally telling people of the two places where are the main directions of co-operation both governments agree on. That helps in aligning direction, energy, focuses and also our time, because time is precious. So all of them now, these are the areas we can co-operate on and work hard on as well. That will bring returns in much shorter time, in much bigger scale. Already, I have heard some delegations forming to come to Hong Kong, so as to further continue the link. I am very positive with the overall results, and I will be seeing a lot of activities, not just between government-and-government exchange, but also business-to-business, individuals-to-individuals. And that is why I am also very thrilled to announce a lot of convenience that we have created for visa, for going through the boundary, both goods and people.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the remarks.)

